

democracy after 10 years of independence and calling for a review of United States policy toward South Sudan.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. LEAHY (for himself, Mr. SCHUMER, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. WARNOCK, Mr. OSSOFF, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. BENNET, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. BROWN, Ms. CANTWELL, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. CARPER, Mr. CASEY, Mr. COONS, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Ms. HASSAN, Mr. HEINRICH, Mr. HICKENLOOPER, Ms. HIRONO, Mr. KAINE, Mr. KELLY, Mr. KING, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. LUJÁN, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. MERKLEY, Mr. MURPHY, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. PADILLA, Mr. PETERS, Mr. REED, Ms. ROSEN, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. SCHATZ, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Ms. SINEMA, Ms. SMITH, Ms. STABENOW, Mr. TESTER, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. WARNER, Ms. WARREN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, and Mr. WYDEN):

S. 4. A bill to amend the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to revise the criteria for determining which States and political subdivisions are subject to section 4 of the Act, and for other purposes; read the first time.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, it is really with hope, pride, and optimism that I rise today to honor the legacy of an icon of the civil rights movement, a hero of democracy, and a dear personal friend of mine: John Lewis.

More than anything, John Lewis was a man of action. Where he saw suffering, he tried to end it. Where he saw injustice, he tried to correct it. Where “good trouble” was needed, he showed up for it.

The most fitting way to honor the legacy of John Lewis is to take action ourselves—the action that he would have. So it is with pride today that I introduce the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021. It is a vital piece of legislation to restore the landmark Voting Rights Act.

Now, this legislation is the culmination of many months of tireless work across the Halls of Congress, back and forth between the House and the Senate. But that is exactly what Congressman Lewis would have wanted to see. That work began by building the record and telling the story of the current conditions for voters across the country.

But what did that record show?

A shocking picture.

Empowered by the Supreme Court’s damaging 2013 decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, States across the country have been advancing and enacting sweeping voter suppression efforts to make it more—not less—difficult for American citizens to participate in their own democracy.

Can you imagine that—making it harder for Americans to participate in their own democracy?

And today, tens of thousands of Americans are being disenfranchised under the guise of State law. And it is no coincidence that certain communities consistently bear the brunt of these suppression schemes across the country.

Throughout our history, we have worked to make our democracy ever more inclusive, not exclusive. With each generation, we have sought to empower millions more to be equal participants in America’s system of self-government. So make no mistake: This tidal wave of voter suppression effort seeks to bend the arc of equal justice and equal rights backward. We should not allow that to stand.

Action in Congress is desperately needed. The House answered the call from Congressman Lewis and others to protect our precious, almost sacred right to vote, and they passed a bold version of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act earlier this year.

Today, in the Senate, we will be introducing a version of that bill that should get the votes needed to restore the Voting Rights Act.

This legislation addresses the Court’s 2013 and 2021 decision. This should be advanced here. It should be passed by the House, and it surely would be signed into law. And there is no reason for delay.

This legislation addresses the Supreme Court’s *Shelby County* decision by restoring the Justice Department’s preclearance powers to prevent States from enacting discriminatory voting changes. The legislation limits the harms caused by the Supreme Court’s *Brnovich* decision earlier this year by enshrining a private right of action and clear factors with which voters can bring lawsuits against attempts to disenfranchise them.

Fundamentally, this legislation seeks to ensure that the Justice Department possesses the tools it needs to protect the right to vote for all Americans, regardless of party or race or creed or background.

Now, you wouldn’t know by listening to the partisan rancor of today’s politics, but this goal—protecting our right to vote—has never been a partisan issue.

John Lewis once said: “We all know this is not a Democratic Republican issue. It is an American one.”

Truer words haven’t been spoken.

We should remember that reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act on a bipartisan basis is the way we have always done it. The core provisions of the Voting Rights Act have been reauthorized five times. Remember that, five times. Every time, this has been done with overwhelming bipartisan support in Congress. It was signed by President Nixon. It was signed by President Reagan. It was signed by President George W. Bush. They all signed the

Voting Rights Act reauthorizations into law. They knew the profound importance of the landmark law for our democracy. In fact, the most recent Voting Rights Act reauthorization was in 2006.

And do you know what the vote was in the U.S. Senate?

Ninety-eight to zero. And many Senators still serving today, both Republican and Democrat, voted to support that legislation.

The toxic partisanship of American politics today has obscured what has, for decades, united us across party lines. This is the belief that protecting our right to vote—the very right that gives democracy its name—is bigger than party or politics. It is the belief that a system of self-government—a government of, by, and for the people—is one that is worth preserving for generations to come. It is the belief that government exists to serve the will of the people, not the other way around.

And that, Mr. President, is what I believe.

And so, today, I hold the memory of John Lewis—of his advocacy, of his passion, of his zealous belief to our better angels—to urge all Senators, regardless of party, to join me in restoring and reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act gives us that opportunity. Congressman Lewis, I know, would have wanted us to come together and find a path forward to addressing the many threats facing Americans’ foundational right to vote.

I will tell you what he would not have accepted. He would not have accepted inaction. So let’s try to live up to the memory and the example of John Lewis—a heroic man of action, one of my dearest friends in my years in the Congress. And I know he is watching over us. Let’s make him proud.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, let me thank my friend, our chairman of the Judiciary, Senator LEAHY, not only for introducing this legislation but for his dedication to voting rights over the many decades that he has served in this body. Few have done more to push voting rights to make sure people have the right to vote without some of the barriers that have always been placed in the way by people who want to discriminate against people—particularly people of color—when it comes to voting. So I thank him.

Mr. President, the story of American democracy is a messy tale of starts and stops. For over 240 years, our march to establish the United States as a full democracy has always seemed to involve two steps forward, one step back.

Today, I am proud to join my colleagues, Senators LEAHY and DURBIN, as they lead this Chamber in another bold step forward by introducing the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, a long-overdue update to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. No piece of legislation has done more to protect the franchise than the Voting Rights

Act of the sixties. Its critical preclearance provision compelled jurisdictions with recent histories of discrimination to secure Federal approval before amending their election laws.

For decades, the Senate reauthorized the VRA's preclearance provisions with bipartisan votes because both parties understood that this powerful Federal tool made our democracy stronger. Sadly, in 2013, a conservative majority on the Supreme Court gutted the VRA's preclearance and cleared the way for some of the most repressive voter suppression laws we have seen in generations.

For those Supreme Court Justices who said this is not necessary, I think they should look at what has happened since preclearance was eliminated. It is just awful, and it was one of the lowest moments of the Supreme Court in recent memory: the Shelby decision.

Now, because of that Shelby decision, in 2021, 19 States, just in this year, 2021, have enacted 33 laws that will limit Americans' access to the ballot, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University. What we are seeing across the States today is nothing short of Jim Crow in the 21st century, aided and abetted and allowed by the Shelby decision, which so tied the hands of the Justice Department when discriminatory legislation was being enacted at the State level.

The Senate must fight back. We must restore the preclearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act and retrofit it to meet the challenges of the 21st century. That is what the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act will do. As an important complement to the Freedom to Vote Act, it will reestablish the VRA's preclearance coverage formula—based on an updated, robust catalog of modern-day voter suppression laws—while adopting new provisions to address the next generation of suppressive voting. This new bill also responds to the Court's troubling ruling in *Brnovich* earlier this year, which even further weakened the VRA's protections against State practices that hinder minorities seeking to vote.

We have to be brutally honest. This country has to look at itself in the mirror. Racial barriers to the ballot are, regrettably, part of our past, our present, and now, with some of these decisions, part of our future. When the Nation was founded, you had to be a White male Protestant property owner in many of the States to vote. Today, we have come a long way in our struggle to live up to our country's founding promise, and this bill takes the next step by restoring the proper role of the Federal Government to protect Americans' constitutional right to participate in our democracy.

As Senator WARNOCK has so eloquently stated, we must put out the fire that is presently engulfing our democracy, and that is what the Freedom to Vote Act will do. We must build a state-of-the-art fire department to prevent future fires. That is what the re-

forms of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act will do.

This is a good bill. This is an urgent bill. As majority leader, it is my intention to hold a vote on this legislation in the near future. I am proud to designate this "S. 4" to mark its critical restoration of the section 4 preclearance formula.

We hope that all of our colleagues will join us in good faith in advancing solutions to ensure all Americans have their voices heard in their democracy. If some of our colleagues on the other side have different ideas of how to protect free and fair elections, we urge them to put them forward. But we will not be deterred just because some of our colleagues choose to stand silent with their arms crossed, content to play politics with the health of our Republic. On this issue, the Senate must act, and we will act.

I want to thank again my colleagues Senators LEAHY and DURBIN for their diligence and leadership on this important piece of legislation and for all they do to make sure this Chamber always works to strengthen our precious democracy.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I want to thank the majority leader for his encouraging and kind words and especially thank my friend and former chair of the Judiciary Committee, Senator PAT LEAHY of Vermont, for inviting other colleagues to come to the floor to speak in support of the right to vote.

Time and again in history, we have asked men and women to stand and risk their lives and, in fact, give their lives for the most fundamental premise of our democracy: the right to vote. They have fought. They have bled. They have died for that right.

Now it is under attack again—not from any foreign source. Over the past few years, our Nation has witnessed the most heavily coordinated assault on the right to vote in modern memory. Since the start of 2021, Republican legislators throughout the country have introduced over 425 pieces of legislation with provisions to make it more difficult for Americans to vote. Thirty-three of these laws were actually enacted in 19 States. Some of these laws have set new limits on voting by mail; others cut hours for polling locations. Each of these proposals is designed to achieve the same outcome: create barriers for Americans when it comes to the ballot box.

One of the strongest champions of democracy in American history was my old friend and colleague John Lewis of Georgia. Days before his passing, John wrote: "Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to help build what we called the Beloved Community, a nation and world society at peace with itself."

It is now this generation's turn to act, John, because nothing less than the survival of America's democracy is at stake.

At a moment when lawmakers across the country are railing around the Big

Lie to strip away our constitutional rights, we in this Senate must have the courage to step up and protect those rights. If the supporters of the former President of the United States are going to defame our democracy, we have to fight to defend it. We can begin by reinvigorating one of the most important pieces of legislation in modern American history: the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

I am sure there are folks who are watching this at home, saying: Wait a minute. How can a piece of legislation signed into law more than 50 years ago be the solution to today's challenge to democracy?

That is because over the past several years, there has been a sustained effort to chip away at the protections guaranteed to every American under that Voting Rights Act.

For instance, in 2013, the Supreme Court issued the decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, essentially nullifying a key provision in the Voting Rights Act, section 5. Prior to the Court's ruling in *Shelby*, section 5 required that localities with a track record of disenfranchising voters of color through tactics as brutal as poll taxes and literacy tests would have to seek Federal approval for changes they make in their voting rules. This requirement is known as preclearance, and it could have prevented many of the restrictive voting provisions being enacted in States like Georgia and Texas today.

Just this past summer, the Supreme Court weakened another section of the Voting Rights Act with its decision in *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee*.

With these wrongful rulings, the Supreme Court has fueled State-led efforts to suppress voters, particularly voters of color. In fact, Justice Elena Kagan wrote in her dissent to *Brnovich* that "in the last decade, this Court has treated no statute worse" than the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

It is time for Congress to uphold our constitutional obligation and restore the Voting Rights Act to its full potential. That is why we join together today to introduce a bill that would not only restore the protections of the Voting Rights Act but strengthen them.

Tomorrow, we will hold a hearing on this critical legislation in the Senate Judiciary Committee. It is called the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. By all means, passing this law should be a bipartisan endeavor. Historically, it always was. It wasn't until very recently that the Republicans—the party of Abraham Lincoln—decided that they would no longer join in our effort to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act. It wasn't that long ago that it was bipartisan and passed easily. The last time Congress voted to do so, in fact, the Republican minority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, came to the floor and said: "This is a piece of legislation which has worked."

Well, let's make sure we keep it working for America. In our Nation, there is no freedom more fundamental than the right to vote, and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act will help ensure that every American can exercise that right that he famously called the "precious, almost sacred" right.

I want to thank Senator LEAHY, Senator BLUMENTHAL, and my colleague Senator WARNOCK for joining us on the floor and a number of our colleagues for the collaboration and hard work on preparing this legislation for introduction and our House colleagues who passed their version of the bill earlier this summer.

I particularly want to thank the man for whom this bill is named. I was honored to count him as a friend—even more when he came in on more than one occasion at my invitation to campaign in the State of Illinois. I was honored to join him on a Sunday morning walk, which I will never forget, over the Edmund Pettus Bridge, John and I talking about that moment in history. It is something I will treasure for a lifetime.

We, in his name, need to honor him and to honor the principles that he gave his life for, making certain that everyone has an opportunity to help us build a beloved community.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am so proud and honored to be with my colleagues Senator LEAHY, Senator DURBIN, and Senator WARNOCK—all of us who are championing the Senate version of the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. I think any of us would be honored to be spearheading a bill named for one of our heroes.

This bill has particular significance to all of us because we lived through the time—the summer of 1965—when States mercilessly attacked John Lewis and 600 others as they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL, in peaceful protest to protect their right to vote.

In the wake of that attack, as the Nation came together to grieve, President Johnson joined with Congress to pursue, as he put it, "an end to voting discrimination in America."

Roughly a week after the attack, President Johnson called for comprehensive voting rights legislation. Two days later, Congress announced that it would take up that legislation. So by early August, just 5 months after "Bloody Sunday" in Selma, the Voting Rights Act was passed by Congress with broad bipartisan support and became, again in the words of President Johnson, "one of the most monumental laws in the entire history of American freedom."

Today, with the introduction of this legislation, we honor the legacy of John Lewis. We honor everyone involved in that great movement at the time that advanced civil rights and liberty, the most fundamental being the right to vote, and we honor the fight itself to protect the franchise.

A century after the Civil War ended, our Nation had failed to eradicate the blight of racial discrimination in voting. The promise of equality—political equality as well as economic equality—remained unfulfilled for Black citizens.

The Voting Rights Act did what even the 14th and 15th Amendments failed to do, proving to be a uniquely powerful tool with the capacity to meet ever-new forms of discrimination through its preclearance regime.

Then, in 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Shelby County*—well known to all of us—gutted, absolutely eviscerated the highly effective preclearance regime, jeopardizing the progress the Voting Rights Act made over the course of half a century.

As Justice Ginsburg said in her moving and powerful dissent in *Shelby*, until Congress enacted the Voting Rights Act's preclearance requirement, early attempts to cope with the vile infection of racial discrimination in voting "resembled battling the Hydra. Whenever one form of voting discrimination was identified and prohibited, others sprang up in their place."

Today's reinvigorated efforts to deprive members of minority groups from equal access to the ballot box through more subtle, second-generation barriers prove that a new preclearance regime is needed now more than ever.

This year alone, we have experienced the most destructive legislative session for voting rights in generations, with States and localities enacting a torrent of new voting restrictions, all of it designed to suppress the vote, to curtail the franchise, to move back the clock on voting rights.

Between January 1 and July 14 of this year, more than 400 voting restriction bills have been introduced in 49 States—49 States—and 18 States successfully enacted 30 laws that make it harder for people to vote.

These laws make mail voting and early voting more difficult. They manipulate the boundaries of districts to reduce minority representation, and they have led to the purge of up to 3.1 million voters from the rolls in areas that were once covered by the Voting Rights Act preclearance requirement.

In short, this threat is more than just speculative, far from imaginative or suggestive. The threat is real and urgent. In fact, it is more than a threat. It is action now moving forward in States.

Today's legislation would confront this resurgence of voting restrictions very directly. The new John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act includes new formulas to revive preclearance.

By focusing specifically on jurisdictions with a proven history of discrimination and on preventing specific known discriminatory practices from taking effect in areas of increasing diversity before they can do damage, this new preclearance coverage formula responds to the Supreme Court's concerns and will allow the Voting Rights Act to keep pace with present condi-

tions and America's rapidly changing demographics.

The bill also reinvigorates the Department of Justice's ability to challenge discriminatory laws already in effect, reversing the Supreme Court's latest attack on Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act in *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee*. That 6–3 partisan decision was a stunning display of judicial overreach—a highly political, highly partisan decision that gives new meaning to the phrase "judicial activism," a case of judicial overreach.

Protecting the right to vote, very simply, should not be a partisan issue. In fact, voting rights are widely supported throughout American society—on the left, right, center, private, and in public sectors.

Since the original inception of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, overwhelming bipartisan majorities of both Houses of Congress reauthorized the Voting Rights Act five times.

Let me repeat: Both Houses of Congress, bipartisan majority, overwhelming vote, five times since the original passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

And for nearly a century after the Civil War and before the Voting Rights Act, the scourge of racial discrimination in voting challenged our Nation's core commitment to these ideals of democracy. From that century of sacrifice and suffering came the Voting Rights Act and its extraordinary commitment to realizing our Nation's highest ideals; and for decades, it worked with bipartisan support overwhelmingly.

The Judiciary Committee, under the leadership of Senator DURBIN and Senator LEAHY, has documented powerfully the need for this Act.

And my Subcommittee on the Constitution has held one hearing already. We will have another shortly that will set the record—in fact, provide the evidentiary support—that the Supreme Court erroneously found lacking in its *Shelby* decision.

As a tsunami of voter suppression bills crashes against the shores of our democracy, my hope is that today we can renew a bipartisan commitment to protecting voting rights in this country.

I am proud to help lead this effort in the Senate, and I want to thank my colleagues again for being on the floor today.

Mr. WARNOCK. Mr. President, as a proud son of the great State of Georgia and a voice for our State here in this Chamber, I am deeply honored to join my colleagues here today to introduce this important legislation in honor of one of Georgia's and America's most influential public servants.

I am grateful for the comments of Senator BLUMENTHAL, and I want to thank Senator LEAHY and all of my colleagues for their leadership in introducing this bill that carries on the legacy of Congressman Lewis's pivotal

work to protect the sacred right to vote.

John Lewis was my parishioner, and as I stand in support of this legislation named in his honor, I think of the many conversations I had with him over the years. I think of the Sunday mornings we boarded a bus, taking souls to the polls because I believe that voting, as he did, is a sacred undertaking. At root, it is about people's voice. And in that sense, it is about one's humanity.

I learned so much from Congressman Lewis and the lessons from his lived experiences working deep in the trenches to defend and advance voting rights. He laid it all on the line. When President Johnson took his pen and signed this legislation, making it law in a real sense, what he etched had already been affirmed in blood—the risk that John Lewis took, the ultimate sacrifice that others made as they lost their lives fighting for the vote, the voice, the humanity of every child of God.

And one of the most important tools that came out of that activism, that came out of that human sacrifice—one of the most important tools in this legislation is the process of preclearance. This process required that jurisdictions with a proven history of voting rights violations get approval from the Department of Justice or our Federal courts before making changes to local voting administration.

And, for decades, this was the tool that helped enfranchise countless voters, ensuring that they would have access to the ballot to exercise their constitutional right, and it kept some of the worst voter suppression efforts at bay.

And then, in 2013, the Supreme Court, in *Shelby v. Holder*, asked the Congress to update the coverage formula that determines which States are subject to preclearance. The Supreme Court said that this preclearance formula had somehow been outdated and Congress ought to bring it up to date. That is what they asked us to do in 2013.

Since then, Congress has been unwilling to act. Preclearance has been allowed to atrophy. And we have seen the results not only in Georgia, but in Texas, in Arizona, in Pennsylvania, all across our country. Earlier this year in Georgia, State leaders enacted a voter suppression law that will undoubtedly make it harder for some people to vote. If the tool of preclearance were in place right now, SB202 in Georgia likely would not even be on the books.

I think of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in her dissenting opinion. When that decision came down, she said:

Throwing out preclearance when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet.

We threw away our umbrella, and we have found ourselves in the midst of a torrential rainstorm. Voter suppression laws are mushrooming all over the country. We are witnessing right now

what happens to our democracy without the protections of preclearance and the other vital provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

The lack of robust voting rights protections has ramifications for every American, as we have seen efforts ramp up this year at passing sweeping, State-level voter suppression laws—not laws that only impact Black people and people of color, to be sure, but also students, seniors, whomever certain politicians are afraid of will somehow get in the way of their craven march to power.

And so this bill, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, is about Congress finally doing its job—finally doing what the Supreme Court asked us to do in 2013. It should have been done a long time ago.

The updated Voting Rights Advancement Act we are introducing today restores the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It strengthens our democracy by reestablishing preclearance, and it makes it better by updating it to also protect against specific practices we know suppress the vote, like polling place closures and new types of voter roll purges happening not only in the South, but all over the country.

Our bill also restores Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act to protect minority communities from discriminatory voting practices after the Supreme Court diminished Section 2 earlier this year.

Mr. President, just like the Freedom to Vote Act me and many of my colleagues introduced just a few weeks ago to set national standards for voting so every eligible voice is heard, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act we introduce today is designed to meet future challenges and address additional antidemocratic efforts aimed at suppressing the vote all over our country.

Since I was elected on January 5, since that terrible day on January 6, when this very Capitol was assaulted, we have seen more than 400 proposals in 49 States. So the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act builds for us a fire station to protect against future fires, but the house of democracy is already on fire. And so we need the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, but we also need the Freedom to Vote Act. We have got to put out the fire. We have got to build a fire station for future fires.

Mr. President, I know there is a lot on our plate, but we can't waste any time getting these bills passed. We can walk and chew gum at the same time.

John Lewis walked across a bridge in order to build a bridge to a new American future. We already had infrastructure. He understood that the infrastructure of our democracy was in trouble, and so he walked across a bridge in order to build a bridge.

So the House has already passed a version of this act. And I know my friend, Senator JOE MANCHIN, has been having conversations about the Freedom to Vote Act with our friends

across the aisle. We are happy to talk to anybody on both sides of the aisle. A similar version of this legislation has been voted up by this Chamber repeatedly in the past with strong bipartisan support. Some 16 Republican Senators who were either here or in the House when it passed in 2006 98-0 are here today, and I ask them: What is the difference?

Voting rights are not just another issue. Voting rights are a preservative of all other rights. Voting rights are about the foundation of our democracy. And I believe that if the world's greatest deliberative body can't find a way forward to get this done, history will judge us harshly, and rightly so.

Reinhold Niebuhr said that humankind's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but our inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary. This work, this assignment, which we have right now, is both possible and necessary. We can do it, and we must do it. It is the most important thing we can do this Congress, and I hope we will do it now.

Mr. LUJAN. Mr. President, it is an honor to speak in support of the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to protect the voting rights of all Americans.

Our democracy is at its strongest when every American can participate and make their voice heard—something that our friend, our colleague, a mentor to many of us, the late John Lewis—it is what he fought for his entire life. But in too many communities across America, voter suppression efforts are making it harder for Americans to vote, especially Native Americans, who continue to experience geographic, linguistic, and legal barriers.

That is why I am proud that the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act includes the Native American Voting Rights Act, which I was proud to introduce in August in the Senate and spent years fighting for in the House, developing this legislation with voting rights advocates across America. This much needed legislation would protect the sacred right to vote and reduce barriers to the ballot box for voters living on Tribal lands—vital progress to protect the sacred right to vote for all Americans.

This past year, America has seen unprecedented efforts to restrict access to the ballot box, to make it harder to vote, and silence our voices, especially Native voices. It is unacceptable, and it is all the more reason why the Senate must pass robust voting rights legislation that empowers Tribes and Native American voters, because our democracy is strongest when everyone participates.

It is our moral imperative to protect the right to vote, to combat the discrimination that has long kept Americans from exercising this right. With millions of Americans calling on this body to deliver on voting rights legislation, I strongly support the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. It is

the right thing to do. It is the time to get this done.

By Mr. CARDIN (for himself, Mr. DURBIN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. KAINE, Mr. MERKLEY, Mr. MARKEY, Ms. ROSEN, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. PETERS, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. PADILLA, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. LUJÁN, and Mr. SANDERS):

S. 2937. A bill to authorize humanitarian assistance and civil society support, promote democracy and human rights, and impose targeted sanctions with respect to human rights abuses in Burma, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

Mr. CARDIN, Mr. President, I rise today to introduce the Burma Unified through Rigorous Military Accountability Act of 2021, BURMA, which is cosponsored by Senators DURBIN, MARKEY, MERKLEY, FEINSTEIN, KAINE, ROSEN, MURRAY, PETERS, KLOBUCHAR, PADILLA, WYDEN, and LUJÁN.

We are doing so in tandem with simultaneous introduction of a companion bill today in the House of Representatives by House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman MEEKS, along with Representatives CHABOT and McCAUL and others. The purpose in short is to provide a legislative foundation to certain steps the Biden administration has undertaken by Executive order and to push the executive branch to be even more forward-leaning in addressing the February 1 coup d'état and the ongoing human rights being committed by the Burmese military, the Tatmadaw. The legislation includes authorization to impose sanctions on individuals and entities who helped stage the February 1 coup d'état and are responsible for the subsequent repression of fundamental freedoms, human rights abuses, use of indiscriminate violence towards civilians, and other gross atrocities; authorization to prohibit the import of precious and semi-precious gemstones from Burma into the United States; authorization for a new position at the State Department, a Special Coordinator for Burmese Democracy, to promote an international effort to impose and enforce multilateral sanctions on Burma and coordinate U.S. Government interagency efforts on Burma; authorization for support to civil society and for humanitarian assistance in Burma, Bangladesh, Thailand, and the surrounding region; requires the Secretary of State to make a determination whether the persecution of the Rohingya in Burma constitutes genocide; and a call for the United States to take more decisive action with regard to Burma at the United Nations.

Throughout its independence, Burma's history has suffered decades of repressive military rule and civil war with ethnic minority groups, and what we are seeing today in Burma is no different.

In 1988, thousands of people took the streets to protest the government. Under the leadership of then-General

Ne Win, who ruled for 26 years following a coup, security forces cracked down on protestors, killing thousands of citizens. During these uprisings, Aung San Suu Kyi emerged as a charismatic national icon, preaching democracy and nonviolence as she highlighted the political situation in Burma.

In 1990, the military junta agreed to hold the first multiparty elections in 30 years in which Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, won 81 percent of the seats in the government with over 70 percent voter turnout. However, the ray of hope in Burma was quickly diminished when the military refused to recognize the results and hand over power. Aung San Suu Kyi was detained and remained under house arrest for nearly 15 years—until her release in 2010 as the country continued to be ruled by the military.

In 2011, President Thein Sein agreed to a series of reforms, including granting amnesty to political prisoners, relaxing media censorship, and implementing economic policies to encourage foreign investment. Aung San Suu Kyi became a member of Parliament when her party won 43 of the 45 vacant seats in the 2012 by-elections, as ongoing negotiations between civilians and military officials continued.

In 2015, Myanmar held its first nationwide, multiparty elections—considered to be the freest and fairest elections in decades—since the country's transition away from military rule. Her party boycotted the 2010 elections, resulting in a decisive victory for the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party. In the 2015 elections, Aung San Suu Kyi's party won a landslide victory, taking 86 percent of the seats in the Assembly of the Union. Although she was prohibited from becoming the President due to a clause in the constitution specifically to keep her from office, she assumed the role of State Counsellor of Myanmar. Yet, despite the façade of civilian governance that had been established in Burma, the real political power continued to rest in the hands of the military.

Three years on, following decades of ongoing persecution, including confinement to ghettos, stripping away of citizenship rights, restrictions on healthcare and fertility, military unleashed a horrifying display of state-sanctioned violence in Rakhine state in August 2017, which resulted in wide-scale human rights violation, including tens of thousands of deaths, sexual violence, torture, unlawful arrest and detention, and widespread destruction of the Rohingya people's homes and communities. Over 736,000 survivors fled to refugee camps in Bangladesh, where they remain to this day, in urgent need of humanitarian aid, increased support—and justice.

Since 2019, I joined my colleagues in the Senate in calling on directing the State Department to determine whether attacks by the Burmese military

and security forces against the Rohingya constitutes genocide. The United States has still not issued a determination on whether the atrocities committed against the Rohingya constitute genocide, even though human rights investigators funded by the State Department concluded in 2018 that “there are reasonable grounds to believe that genocide was committed.” U.N. investigators have also found evidence that infers genocidal intent. This is something my colleagues and I address in our BURMA bill. The United States should lead in calling what happened what it is: a genocide.

On February 1, 2021, the Burmese military led a coup against the democratically elected legislature, just hours before the Parliament was scheduled to be seated terrifying setback for the emerging potential for democracy and rule-of-law in Burma.

Since seizing control, the military forces have killed over a thousand people across the country as they crack down on civilian protestors who have mobilized to oppose the ongoing assault on the country's nascent political institutions and traditions. Rather than follow the outcome of the parliamentary elections held last November, the Burmese military has detained Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, and other civilians, including other government officials. The military has also cut internet and telephone communication, and it has stopped flights in the country.

For years, the Burmese military has been responsible for much of the violence against minority groups in Burma, including the Rohingya. More than 1 million Rohingya have fled the country and become refugees as a result of the military's atrocities against them. This coup d'état further damages democratic institutions in Burma and makes the entire region less stable.

As the death toll in Myanmar continues to rise, the United States must not be indifferent to Burma's fate. The Burmese military has also been responsible for horrible atrocities committed against minority groups in Burma, including the Rohingya, which has led more than 1 million to flee the country and become refugees. In recent months, the Tatmadaw, the country's military, escalated its brutal campaign, using COVID-19 like a biological weapon to terrorize and control the people of Burma. The military has arrested government officials, doctors, nurses, and journalist, including U.S. citizen Danny Fester.

The bill aims to authorize sanctions on individuals and entities who helped stage the February 1 coup d'état and are responsible for the subsequent repression of fundamental freedoms, human rights abuses, use of indiscriminate violence towards civilians, and other gross atrocities; authorizes increased humanitarian assistance for Rohingya refugees and provides support for civil society and independent media; prohibits the import of

gemstones from Burma into the United States; calls for the United States to pressure the United Nations to take more decisive action with regards to Burma; and requests a genocide determination regarding the persecution of the Rohingya.

It is important for the international community to continue to pressure the military junta to restore democracy for the people of Burma. The behavior of the Tatmadaw has not and will not change—thus the need for additional & forceful actions by the United States and international community to bring justice, accountability, and restore democracy.

I remain committed to continuing to work with the Biden administration and my colleagues in Congress to ensure that the United States and international response to the military coup is coordinated and targeted to have a strong impact on those responsible, while also encouraging a peaceful transition of power back to the civilian government. I continue to stand in solidarity with the people of Burma and condemn the ongoing violence against them.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I have 9 requests for committees to meet during today's session of the Senate. They have the approval of the Majority and Minority Leaders.

Pursuant to rule XXVI, paragraph 5(a), of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the following committees are authorized to meet during today's session of the Senate:

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

The Committee on Armed Services is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 9:30 a.m., to conduct a hearing on nominations.

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS

The Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 9:45 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS

The Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs is authorized to meet in executive session during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 9:45 a.m., to vote on nominations.

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Committee on Foreign Relations is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 10:15 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Committee on Foreign Relations is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

The Committee on the Judiciary is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

The Select Committee on Intelligence is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a closed briefing.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION, PRODUCT SAFETY, AND DATA SECURITY

The Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, October 5, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

MEASURE READ THE FIRST TIME—S. 4

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk, and I ask for its first reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bill by title for the first time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 4) to amend the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to revise the criteria for determining which States and political subdivisions are subject to section 4 of the Act, and for other purposes.

Mr. WARNER. I now ask for a second reading, and in order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to my own request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection having been heard, the bill will be read a second time on the next legislative day.

ORDERS FOR WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2021

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 10 a.m., Wednesday, October 6; that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and morning business be closed; that upon conclusion of morning business, the Senate proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the Merriam nomination; further, that the cloture motion on the Merriam nomination ripen at 11:30 a.m.; that if cloture is invoked on the nomination, all postcloture time expire at 2:15 p.m.; finally, if the nomination is confirmed, that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action,

and the Senate then resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. WARNER. If there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order following the remarks of Senators BARRASSO and COLLINS.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Maine.

CONFIRMATION OF DARCIE N. McELWEE

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, it is with a great deal of hometown pride that I rise in strong support of the confirmation of Darcie McElwee to be the new U.S. attorney for the State of Maine. Both Darcie and I are natives of the northern Maine community of Caribou.

Since 2002, Darcie has been an assistant U.S. attorney, and she has served as the Project Safe Neighborhoods coordinator for that office since 2005. She primarily has prosecuted violent crime cases, including those involving sex trafficking, interstate domestic violence, and child sexual exploitation, as well as firearms and arson cases. Darcie served as assistant district attorney for Penobscot County and Piscataquis County from 1998 to 2002.

Darcie is a member of the Maine Trial Lawyers Association and a past president of the Cumberland Bar Association. She has also served as an adjunct professor at the University of Maine School of Law and at the Maine Trial Lawyers College of Advocacy. Darcie received her J.D. degree from the University of Maine School of Law in 1998, and her undergraduate degree from Bowdoin College.

Throughout her career, Darcie has worked tirelessly to keep Mainers safe from violent crime and to achieve justice for victims. She is an intelligent, experienced, and highly competent law enforcement professional. Her extensive track record as a career prosecutor makes her ideally suited for this important position.

Based on her experience and her character, as well as her Caribou roots, I have every confidence that Darcie will faithfully uphold our Nation's laws and work to ensure public safety and order. Throughout her distinguished career, she has demonstrated a strong commitment to public service, and I know that she will serve the State of Maine and our Nation extremely well as Maine's next U.S. attorney.

I am absolutely delighted that the Senate, without dissent, tonight confirmed Darcie McElwee for this important position.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.